

Pain Medication Safety Guidelines in the Emergency Department

Why are there emergency department guidelines for prescribing pain medication?

The guidelines were created to help reduce the recent rise in abuse, addiction, overdose, and death from prescription pain medication. Our emergency department follows them to help protect your health by making sure your pain is treated safely and properly.

For your safety, the emergency department might not prescribe pain medication to people already prescribed pain medication or who have chronic pain. This is to help make sure they do not receive unsafe amounts. Only one doctor should prescribe your pain medication. Having your personal doctor prescribe pain medication, follow your care, and address your needs is the best way to control your pain safely. Your doctor knows your pain management plan and if you have medical conditions or take prescription medicines that can be dangerous when using pain medication other than he/she prescribed.

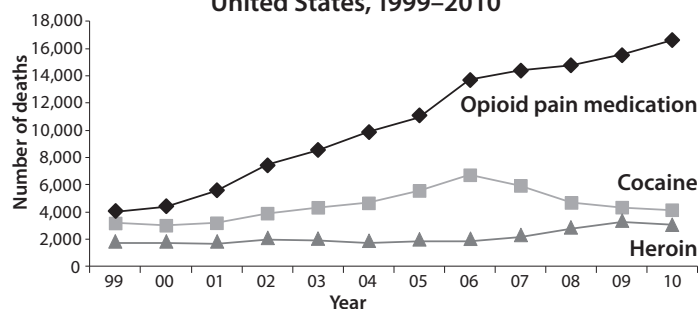
The emergency department only provides safe temporary pain relief if you have a new injury,

until you can connect with your doctor. Your doctor will be able to provide on-going care and help manage your pain during your recovery.

What are the dangers when pain medication is not taken as prescribed?

If too large of a dose is taken, it can slow breathing so much that it results in death. It can also cause a seizure or coma. Some medical conditions, prescription medicines, and drugs increase the chance of accidentally overdosing while on prescription pain medication.

**Drug Overdose Deaths of All Intents by Major Drug Type
United States, 1999–2010**



Source: National Vital Statistics System

Examples of opioid pain medication are oxycodone (OxyContin and Percocet), hydrocodone (Vicodin), fentanyl, and methadone.

What problems have prescription pain medications been causing?

- Deaths from prescription pain medication overdose have reached an epidemic level in the past decade.
- Most overdose deaths are an accident.
- Over 2 million people are currently addicted to them.
- Deaths from overdose are four times higher nationally than in 1999, and 12 times higher in Washington State than in 1995.
- Prescription pain medication has been involved in more deaths than cocaine and heroin combined since 2003, with 16,651 deaths in 2010.
- In Washington State alone, about 407 people died from accidental overdose in 2011.